



HUCTW-Harvard Negotiations Moving Slowly, 9/16/2015

HUCTW is presently in negotiations with the University, on a new Agreement to replace the current Harvard-HUCTW contract that expires on September 30, 2015. In the past several weeks, these discussions have entered a more intensive phase. Although the tone of our meetings, ongoing since May, has been serious and constructive, and important data, background information, and perspectives have been shared, progress toward a settlement has been very slow. The issues under discussion are complex and urgent, especially in the areas of pay and health care benefits.

This message contains up-to-date information about key issues and challenges in the contract talks, and an invitation for Union members to engage more deeply in supporting our negotiating efforts.

Pay Program

A primary HUCTW goal in the ongoing negotiation is to agree on a salary increase program that provides Union members with meaningful real pay growth – raises that move us ahead faster and further than the cost of living. For many years and through many rounds of negotiation, it has been a priority for our Union to ensure that our members' commitment, skill-building, and years of service are rewarded with progress toward a sustainable, middle class standard of living in the Boston area.

In our most recent (2012-2015) Agreement, HUCTW members received raises that resulted in solid salary growth over Boston-area inflation (which has been low ever since the 2008 economic crash). That pay program also met an important goal for our Union -- delivering greater wage growth for members at the lower-paid end of our HUCTW pay range.

Many of the broad economic factors currently in effect are similar to those at the time of the last round of negotiations. As measured by the federal government, inflation in consumer prices (the cost of living) remains relatively low. And, even though there has been some fluctuation, the University's financial condition continues to be strong. As heard commonly in union meetings and conversations among HUCTW members, and detailed in our [2015 HUCTW Negotiations Survey Report](#), Harvard staff continue to experience persistent financial pressures from the high and growing costs of basic necessities such as Boston-area rental housing, childcare, education, and transportation costs. Union negotiators are committed to working vigorously and creatively to reach agreement on a pay program that fully recognizes and generously supports HUCTW members in achieving stronger financial security.

Health Care

In the important policy area of health care benefits, University negotiators are proposing that HUCTW agree to a version of the health plan design that Harvard implemented for non-union staff and faculty in 2015. The 2015 changes included the introduction of deductibles and coinsurance, increased copayments, and out-of-pocket cost maximums that are significantly

higher than the current co-payment “cap” (administered as the Copay Reimbursement Program).

HUCTW leaders have expressed deep concerns about exposing employees to the risk of substantial new and unpredictable out-of-pocket costs, and about the regressive effects of a design that puts the most severe cost burden on lower-income employees, on those with chronic health conditions, and on families. Additionally, based on research into the impact of these types of plans, it is clear that coinsurance and deductibles are a blunt instrument – while they lead to lowered costs for the employer, they also lead to some patients putting off necessary care due to financial concerns. Not only is this a troubling direction for the health of our staff, it could also lead to increased costs for the University and employees in future years.

Union negotiators are pressing forward ideas that are based on “win-win” strategies for reducing medical spending as a community – ideas that will save money for the University and for the workforce, while making employees healthier. Some of those proposals include:

- Efforts to maximize the already impressive savings achieved by the Harvard University Group Health Plan (HUGHP), by finding ways to encourage employees to consider switching from Harvard Pilgrim Health Care into HUGHP. The HUGHP plan options provide significantly less expensive care than Harvard Pilgrim offerings, with a comparable high level of quality and accessible facilities throughout the Boston area.
- Programs to educate employees about how they can help to ensure that care is received in the most appropriate and least costly facilities or settings, and to reward patients who are able to choose a less-costly care option.
- Investments in more strategic and effective wellness programming, which build on Harvard’s existing offerings, but specifically target the most prevalent and costly health conditions and broaden employee access.

Health care talks have been slow to progress, primarily because University negotiators have not up until mid-September been willing to engage in detailed discussions about the non-union health plan design for 2016, which HUCTW is being asked to consider adopting.

Other Policy Areas

Union negotiators have also introduced several other important workplace policy questions into the ongoing talks:

- Flexibility and Alternative Work Arrangements – HUCTW is interested in expanding the existing opportunities for union members to work with flexible schedules or alternative arrangements, such as offsite work or telecommuting. These options can be extremely important to Union members for educational pursuits, transportation challenges, childcare or eldercare responsibilities, employee health, community service, and other needs.
- Parking Policies – Our Union is eager to collaborate with administrators on strategies for making parking fees fair and affordable.

- Career Counseling – HUCTW negotiators are hoping to create new and better opportunities for Union members to receive one-on-one counseling about career navigation strategies at Harvard and more broadly.

Next Steps

Union negotiators will continue working hard to make the talks more intensive and productive, and pressing University representatives to engage seriously and creatively in a search for mutually beneficial solutions. Meetings are scheduled twice weekly through September, and additional sessions are being arranged. HUCTW and Harvard have also been working with a team of well-respected mediators, for additional facilitation and neutral advice.

We strongly encourage HUCTW members to take part in one of the lunchtime Union meetings being scheduled across all parts of the University throughout September. These meetings are a great way to participate in important substantive and strategic discussions about crucial questions in these negotiations and in our working lives.

In addition, HUCTW Organizers, Executive Board members, and Union Representatives will be asking members and friends in the community to support our important negotiation priorities in various visible ways, as we approach the September 30 expiration date, including displaying [HUCTW posters and graphics](#) in your work spaces and common areas.

Please feel free to call or write to HUCTW at [617-661-8289](tel:617-661-8289) or huctw.info@huctw.org if you have any ideas or questions, or are not able to attend a lunchtime Union meeting in your area. Thank you.

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